

Mayor's Climate Council - Stamford, CT

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STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF SB 979: ENERGY AFFORDABILITY, ENERGY EFFICIENCY, AND GREEN CITIES

We, the members of the Stamford Mayor Caroline Simmon's Climate Council, are writing to enthusiastically support SB 979 Energy Affordability, Energy Efficiency, and Green Cities.

Our council is a diverse, interdisciplinary advisory group that consists of local policy makers, advocates, architects, sustainability consultants, farm managers, and more. The goal of our council is to foster dialogue on issues related to climate change, sustainability, resiliency, and to identify specific policy recommendations that will reduce Stamford's carbon footprint.

Our mandate is also to incorporate environmental justice, equity, and sustainability initiatives across the city. As a coastal city, we want to see the furtherance of policies that will make Stamford more resilient to the effects of climate change. The council also aims to support the creation of green energy jobs and protect Stamford's environment to focus on preserving clean air and water.

Therefore, we would like to thank the committee and its leadership, Governor Lamont, and Commissioner Dykes for introducing this bill which we believe will provide state-level tools and support towards achieving all of these goals. We believe SB 979 will promote the decarbonization of the built environment by raising the bar for building energy performance through stretch codes, increasing protection for renters through energy transparency, and providing for contractor education and licensing to help us all better transition to a clean energy economy.

The building sector is the largest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions nationally and this is true as well in the State of Connecticut. The stretch code will allow municipalities such as Stamford to adopt the commercial and/or residential zero energy appendix 2021 International Energy Conservation Code that has already been adopted state-wide. Members of the council who work in the building sector in other states have already seen the positive impact of the

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stretch codes in providing municipalities more options to promote greater energy efficiency and improve the quality of their building stock while reducing residents' energy burden.

Buildings being designed in the near future will come online when the need to be carbon neutral is even more urgent than it is today, and therefore we can act now to ensure that the trajectory of these designs will be heading in the right direction to meet these goals and avoid costly retrofits in the future. We would like the bill to include a stated preference for electrification of all building systems such as HVAC, hot water, and cooking. The technology for building electrification is now robust, widely available, and highly efficient and can ensure that new construction or substantial renovations will not increase local air pollution or adversely impact indoor air quality for occupants, in addition to meeting emissions reduction goals.

Energy offsets today will be more impactful for offsetting the carbon in our atmosphere than energy saved in the future because of the cumulative impact of greenhouse gas emissions and the expected continued decarbonization of the electricity grid over time. The manufacture and transportation of building materials carries with it an embodied carbon cost to the initial construction process, and therefore the members of the Climate Council support including embodied carbon reduction of building materials and construction to the stretch code requirements. While many of the existing carbon regulations nationally such as New York City's Local Law 97 or Boston's Building Emissions Reduction and Disclosure Ordinance (BERDO) focus on operational carbon, these cities and many others are starting to progress new legislation meant to augment existing laws and address embodied carbon as well. We should leapfrog to join them as we catch up on the operational carbon requirements through stretch codes.

We support creating a budget for education of all involved in the building sector including contractors, architects, developers, and other professionals. Local officials should also be educated to ensure proper interpretation and enforcement of the stretch code and its provisions. Passive House, LEED Gold (or greater), or Living Building certifications can serve as alternative compliance paths to streamline compliance and enforcement.

Municipal grants or funding should be contingent on aligning with the stretch code, as states like Massachusetts or cities like Los Angeles require.

Next, energy transparency is an important consumer protection measure for owners and renters. In a time of rising energy costs, CT residents seeking to rent a home cannot accurately predict their total monthly expenses without being able to understand the likely energy demand of their new place of residence. In many cases, the additional burden that energy costs place on renters can lead to housing insecurity or force them to make a compromise in thermal comfort to reduce energy costs, negatively impacting their health and wellbeing.

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Information on which to base decisions will protect renters from higher than expected energy costs while incentivising landlords to make proper investments in their property related to reducing energy consumption in order to make their property attractive to lease. We believe that the onus to disclose energy use should be on the landlord rather than on the tenant to request, and furthermore that the energy label be listed on the online rental listing.

We strongly support the development of this energy labeling to act as this consumer protection measure. Any energy labeling developed should be easy to understand and focused on what works best for Connecticut, but align with standard labels such as HERs and Energy Star to simplify development and administration of the label. Loopholes such as exceptions for buildings built after 2000 and owner-occupied rentals should not be allowed in order to ensure consistency and fairness across the program.

Finally, one of the barriers to decarbonizing the built environment is not the ability to achieve it as a goal, but rather contractor familiarity with the newer techniques and technology. Often, this may cause contractors to increase their bids on proposals where clients request more efficient construction or electrification in order to make these options look more costly and unattractive, particularly in regards to systems that may be unfamiliar to them such as heat pumps. Or they may simply shy away from these types of projects altogether.

Requiring adjustments to building trade licensing, apprenticeship, and continued education to include training on heat pump installation, envelope energy improvements, and other new techniques and technology will help expedite the necessary transition to a decarbonized built environment.

As a committee, we think that the nature of the climate crisis demands an urgency to act for the future prosperity of our city of Stamford and for our state as a whole. Yet, the measures to decarbonize the built environment can take the place of common-sense measures that have been well-tested in other states. The change can be brought about with existing technology and to benefit all stakeholders without imposing unachievable requirements. Enabling clear stretch code requirements while tying it to municipal funding can ensure we are moving the needle forward on building performance. Providing energy transparency can protect the most vulnerable among us and move the market to lower the energy burden for renters. And increasing education opportunities for building professionals and licensing requirements for contractors can empower them to contribute to this effort in a meaningful way.